

STEALTH BAGS AND POCKETS

In the bag brief – or design for use, misuse and abuse

Background:

When designing new products designers take on board, consciously or unconsciously, factors and issues which influence their decision making process. These may be classified according to “models” of the design process through which we can gain a greater understanding of the designs created, and the agendas behind them.

This brief is concerned with user-centred design linked to the contemporary fashion context. It asks designers to think about and analyse a system of use, linked to contemporary life in the developed world – particularly urban environments – which involves interaction with, complex systems on a daily basis by various types of people. By considering this interaction in detail, and the user needs of the individuals concerned, we can inform and influence the design process accordingly.

When reviewing a system of use, it is often beneficial – particularly when considering issues about urban mobility - to consider issues about use, alongside potential opportunities for misuse and abuse. This would involve the designer understanding that the users of objects may include legitimate users, but also potential abusers. The brief therefore asks designers to engage with ideas about the dark side of creativity. To ‘think thief’ and take a ‘sideways’ look at products and fashion needs from the point-of-view of non-typical or undesirable uses, such as those generated by adaptive criminals whose viewpoint can provide a creative catalyst to design. You are asked, therefore to take an awry stance at design functionality, in order to obtain greater insight into ways of tackling crime through design. So-called ‘security’ products often take this focus to an extreme and are far too ‘vulnerability led’ and unfashionable looking to get the design balance right. Such products contribute to a ‘fortress’ aesthetic and just look criminal in the most negative sense of the word. A more fertile area for exploration for the designer are those products where security issues have traditionally been eschewed in favour of styling where they might be considered in a new way. None more so than in pocket or bag design.

Brief 1

You are asked to design a bag with stealth storing capacity or a secret ‘pocket’ which corresponds to a system of use. The design of the bag or pocket should address issues of crime within that system, and should be aware of how the history of pockets gave rise to the emergence of the handbag, with a view to reinventing the genre for the 21st century. Moll Cutpurse – a 17th century pickpocket got her name from the technique she used to steal bags from belts. The design you generate should be aimed at using and styling the new object to be created in terms of its own integrity, but also with awareness of fashion and crime issues. Here, you are asked to consider what Andrew Bolton, in **The Supermodern Wardrobe** (2000?) has described as “stealth fashion” issues. These issues may be interpreted by your design in anyway you see fit relating to the potential risk of theft to or from, the pocket or bag you design,.

In order to give some attention to a crime focus you should consider perpetrator techniques – how crimes involving “theft from the person” are actually committed. On our website www.inthebag.org.uk you will see many perpetrator techniques described as ‘dipping’ ‘slashing’ ‘grabbing’, ‘lifting’ as well as strategies aimed at making crime prevention work. Your research should explore user categories as well as abuser categories, and /or develop new ones to explain who will be using your design and what the bag or pocket just happens to defend against.

A 'bag' or a 'pocket' in the context of this project should not be restricted by cultural interpretations of its appearance, or even the history of its emergence, and certainly not crime issues. You should consider the bag as a device, or system for storing, transporting, protecting and providing access to, specific objects in specific environments and for specific uses.

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